

Not Without Us:

The Historic Perspective on the Education Crisis in the Normandy 24:1 Community and Our Battle for Educational Sovereignty



This is a living document that is still undergoing edits and incorporating community feedback.

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Introduction

On the surface, the Normandy Schools Collaborative (formerly the Normandy School District) is a traditional public school district serving 23 municipalities in northern St. Louis County, Missouri. The district operates one comprehensive high school which includes an alternative education program, five grade 1-8 elemiddle schools, and one early learning center (for preschool, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten students). The district is named for Normandy, Missouri, an historic municipality founded by the Lucas and Hunt families from Normandy, France, and one of the primary municipalities served by the district. But beneath the surface, the Normandy Schools Collaborative, despite the name change, remains a communally bonded school district comprised of a unified alliance of municipalities with many longtime and current residents deeply committed to the school district's success.

The story of the Normandy School District and community is an epic saga of both triumph and tragedy. The community enjoyed middle-class prosperity and educational excellence for decades—producing scores of successful community leaders, doctors, lawyers, business professionals, and even motion picture costume designers. Normandy Education and Community Leadership also led the founding of the University of Missouri at St. Louis (UMSL) in the late '50s/early '60s. However, this serenity was interrupted in the '70s and '80s by the societal and global forces of factory closures and the ensuing business disinvestment and population flight for resources and jobs. And ever since, we've had a front-row seat to the gradual demise of our beloved Normandy—watching with frustration and dismay as the majority of the municipalities within the Normandy school district footprint lost ground to these societal ills.

Despite these seemingly insurmountable challenges, our rich history and legacy continue to fuel our commitment and resolve to restore the prosperity and stellar reputation of our beloved school district and community. In the paragraphs to follow, we'll further explore Normandy's yesterday, today, and tomorrow: **yesterday's** defining moments in the '70s and '80s that precipitated a 40-year era of decline; **today's** hard-fought efforts and incremental progress with strategic local partners against a backdrop of continuous external intrusions; and **tomorrow's** hopeful and sovereign path forward.

Yesterday's Defining Moments

To understand the origins of our current community and educational crisis, we must examine our past. The Normandy School District maintained a stellar reputation throughout most of the 20th century. In 1959, the Normandy Board of Education established the Committee of 28, led by Ed Monaco and State Representative P. Wayne Goode, to research and establish a junior college on the site of the original Bellerive Country Club in the Normandy municipality of Bellerive Acres. In 1960, the University of Missouri-Normandy Residence Center opened and later evolved and expanded to become the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Despite these advancements in post-secondary educational offerings, the community was not immune to the early negative effects of globalization. In the 1970s and 1980s, as was the case in many major cities in the Midwest, factories began to close, and residents were unable to maintain their working- and middle-class salaries. The area was also impacted by white flight, when many of the Caucasian residents fled the inner-ring suburban area for locales further west and south. The reduction of industry, businesses, and homeowners and change in the socioeconomic demographics took a toll on the district and the surrounding municipalities that would become the 24:1 Community.

Trying times call for extraordinary leadership. The legendary and late Dr. James Westbury, a founding father of UMSL and a Normandy resident, presided as the district's superintendent during this tumultuous time and oversaw Normandy's transition from the late '70s to early '80s from an all-white middle-class school district to a mostly Black school district edging towards mass poverty. This transition happened in less than a decade. Without the protection of middle-class affluence and the societal "white" privilege afforded to nearly all Caucasian communities, the 24:1 Community fell victim to the very same macro-level structural racism that has plagued Black communities since the Jim Crow era. The new 24:1 community reality of concentrated poverty with a diminished business tax base was compounded by the systemic undervaluation of housing assets in the now nearly all-Black 24:1 Community (modern day red-lining). This is important because a significant portion of public school funding is derived through local tax dollars based on the assessed value of properties in the schools' communities. In a region plagued by decades-long racially induced municipal fragmentation, concentrated poverty, and the systemic undervaluation of housing assets in Black communities, without philanthropic intervention, the inevitable outcome was the under-funding of schools in minority neighborhoods and disparate educational outcomes for minority children.

This became Normandy's new school resourcing reality—and it sparked our ongoing struggle to provide a competitive education for our students through the democratic principles of self-governance and sovereignty.

The Decades-Long Fight for Educational Advancement and the Persistent Threat to Our Educational Sovereignty

In 2010, Normandy School District absorbed the failed Wellston School District under orders of the Missouri Board of Education. Wellston and its school district succumbed first to the same societal ills challenging the Normandy School District and its municipalities. Prior to its re-absorption by the Normandy School District, the Wellston district had about 600 students, one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school. Wellston children had been a part of the Normandy School District in the early 20th century. Ironically, Normandy High School is in the City of Wellston, on the site of the original Eden Seminary at Wellston Station.

In 2012, despite the district's agreement to absorb the Wellston School District and acceptance of its student cohort, the Missouri Board of Education voted to remove accreditation from the Normandy School District due to ongoing academic issues. Superintendent Stanton Lawrence announced his resignation shortly after the state decision.

The next year would bring more change and unrest. In March 2013, the Normandy School Board selected Tyrone McNichols, an administrator in the Hazelwood School District, as its new superintendent of schools. During this time, discipline incident rates at Normandy High School were the second highest among all schools in the St. Louis metropolitan region and the state of Missouri. The cost of transportation and tuition for students who transferred to neighboring districts for the 2013-14 year alone was more than \$11 million.

In October 2013, the Normandy School Board voted to close Bel-Nor Elementary School and lay off more than 100 teachers in response to the district's ongoing financial problems, a move that would save the district about \$3 million. The board also voted to stop paying tuition and transportation costs for students who transferred from the district. In response, several Missouri legislators, including those whose districts included schools receiving transfer students from Normandy, began pressuring the Missouri Board of Education to take over the Normandy School District. On May 20, 2014, the Missouri State Board of Education removed the local Normandy School Board from power. And on June 30, 2014, with no apparent state-level recognition of the macro/structural funding issues contributing to the community and district challenges, the Missouri Board of Education voted to dissolve the school district and remove state accreditation that year for poor academic performance. An appointed Joint Executive Governing Board replaced the elected board, and the district became a new entity directly controlled by the state called the "Normandy Schools Collaborative." In 2015, the Joint Executive

Governing Board installed Dr. Charles Pearson, former retired Normandy educator and former Normandy School Board President, as superintendent.

In the years since state takeover in 2014, parents, the appointed board of residents and former students, officials in the 24:1 Community, Beyond Housing, and an army of benevolent wrap-around service support providers came together to fight for the sovereignty of the now Normandy Schools Collaborative and their children's education. Through mostly local and regional philanthropic interventions, the district made some progress against the Missouri School Improvement Program standards and was provisionally re-accredited under the leadership of Superintendent Pearson and the state-appointed Joint Executive Governing Board. Additionally, a new Early Childhood Education Center was built to increase focus on early learning while numerous structural improvements were made to select schools to facilitate the new elemiddle model, which reduced the number of school transitions by eliminating the middle school and retooling the elementary schools to support grades 1 through 8. (The efficacy of this model is being closely monitored.)

Recognizing the remaining heavy lifting needed to restore full accreditation to the district, a new superintendent with school turnaround experience, Marcus Robinson, was installed in May 2020 following the retirement of Superintendent Pearson.

Despite these steps forward, six years after the state takeover, Normandy students remain significantly behind their peers across the state in the specific Missouri School Improvement Program standard areas of academic achievement and sub-group achievement. Additionally, economic recovery after enactment of the school transfer law has been slow. Since 2013, more than \$40 million has been redirected to neighboring districts in transfer tuition and transportation payments while the district struggles to make investments in instructional quality and delayed infrastructure improvements for the remaining children, who number more than 3,000. These challenges are now further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic pressures and aging building infrastructure left untouched after a 2018 bond issue. These sustained economic challenges make investing in teaching staff and instruction a persistent obstacle.

To compound the current recovery and financial challenges and exacerbate the threat to our educational sovereignty, the Missouri Charter Public School Commission recently agreed to sponsor a new public charter school in the Normandy footprint—with limited input from our community. This action allows outsiders the right to decide the future of our children and further erodes our ability to self-govern our educational institutions.

Advocating for a 21st-Century Education for Black Children **“What We Believe”**

The municipal leaders of the 24:1 Community have pledged their full support to the children of the Normandy Schools Collaborative, their families, and the school system itself to evolve the district into the region’s leader in urban education. They are committed to starting an ongoing conversation with the community, anchored in these beliefs about Black, brown and low-income students and their schools.

Public education can prepare young people of any race, ethnicity, economic demographic, and background to be future leaders.

Locally elected school governance and accountability is important. This is an unquestioned expectation for most Americans—“indeed, over 95% of school districts today are run by locally elected boards of education.”ⁱ Choosing the individuals who make decisions about their children’s education can lead to debates and disagreements, as with any government entity. But the process is a critical opportunity for citizens to engage in the democratic process and help ensure that leadership is open, accessible, and responsive to their needs.

When state takeovers happen, they are more likely to occur in Black and Latino communities that have already seen decades of underinvestment in their public schools and other infringements on their self-governance, particularly their voting rights. The first school takeover in the United States happened in New Jersey in 1989. Since then, other notable takeovers have included Philadelphia, Detroit, and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Often the state releases control of schools to private entities, including privately governed charter schools. In 2015, there were 44 separate governing authorities in New Orleans. Detroit had more than 45.ⁱⁱ The resulting consequences included fragmentation of the community’s political power, loss of community-based institutions, increased segregation, and financial instability caused by the creation of parallel school systems.

Our community can attract and retain quality teachers who understand the complexities of teaching in an urban environment. In the St. Louis area, pay for teachers at majority Black districts averages 10% less than teachers at white majority districts.ⁱⁱⁱ Part of this can be explained by seniority: Teachers in these districts are 4.7 times more likely to be in their first year of teaching. They’re also less likely to have advanced degrees. These factors limit their effectiveness in the classroom and contribute to less rigorous offerings across the schools’ course catalogs—but it does not mean they are inherently poor teachers who are not committed to their students’ success. Having a secure pipeline for the development and promotion of high-quality teachers can ensure that a district attracts *and* retains the talent it needs to improve academic achievement. In turn,

lower turnover rates lead to stronger student-teacher relationships, higher scholastic performance, increased classroom engagement, and a better understanding of the unique character of the school and its families.^{iv}

All students deserve healthy living and learning communities. Transformational parent and local stakeholder engagement in planning and decision-making recognizes the link between students' academic success and the development of the community as a whole. Students don't learn in a vacuum—and when they are surrounded by a sustainable, fully resourced, community-driven educational environment, they will thrive. Such an environment includes:

- Engaging curriculum that is both culturally relevant and challenging.
- A broad selection of courses ranging from arts and sciences to honors and job training.
- An emphasis on high-quality teaching.
- Wrap-around services and supports such as health care providers and social programs that promote individual well-being.
- Positive discipline practices.
- A sense of pride in their surroundings and the narratives that unify them as a collective student body.

Ensuring sufficient funding for high-quality education must be a collective priority. In contrast to local governance, local funding works better for some communities than for others. The concentration of wealth in certain pockets has taken place over many decades, mirroring macro-level societal trends and patterns of racial segregation, both formal and informal. At a national level, there is a \$23 billion gap between the average revenue of majority white and nonwhite school districts, even though they serve roughly the same number of students.^v This starts with the federal government, which contributes around 8 percent of all public school spending through two programs: Title 1, which targets assistance toward low-income students, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which pledges 40 percent of the cost for educating children with disabilities. Both of these programs have been funded at levels much lower than their Congressional appropriations for many years.^{vi} Missouri provides very little state-level funding for education; only New Hampshire provides less.^{vii} The Foundation Formula it has used for 15 years—which makes up 30% of local schools' spending—is chronically underfunded.

In the St. Louis area, majority white districts receive and spend more than majority Black districts, in large part because 56% of funding comes from local sources.^{viii} While per-pupil spending levels may appear to be on par, as is the case in Normandy, that often does not address other factors such as capital improvements, debt servicing, maintenance, community services, non-instruction support, adult education, and other expenditures that often are larger at Black districts.

External influences such as the COVID-19 pandemic can have devastating impacts on education budgets; the shortfall in spending for the 2020-21 school year in Missouri will fall short by \$123 million. There are a wide range of potential long-term remedies, ranging from changes to our state's Foundation Formula to the introduction of a funding model that would pool property taxes by county and thus even out the disparities between communities.

Today's Situation for Normandy Students **"The Current Crisis"**

By nearly every measure, Normandy Schools Collaborative is falling far short of state and national standards. The sobering picture starts with attendance. Research shows that missing 10 percent of school days—about two days per month, or 18 days across the year—negatively affects academic performance.^{ix} Only 70% of Normandy students attend at least 90% of school days.^x

Reading proficiency by third grade is the single most important predictor of high school graduation and career success. Each year more than 80 percent of low-income children miss this crucial milestone.^{xi} This holds true in Normandy, where 16% of third-graders read on grade level, compared to 49% statewide.^{xii} Across both reading and math, the percentage of all students working on grade level is 5%. Virtually no eighth-graders are on grade level in math, compared to 29% statewide.

Student achievement is estimated to be two grade levels behind the national average—and losing ground year to year.^{xiii} When students struggle academically, the district's intervention strategy is undifferentiated and uncoordinated, leaving these most vulnerable students farther behind.

Normandy's dropout rate of 15% is on par with the national high school graduation rate of 85.3%—but nearly four times the state average of 4%.^{xiv} Those who do graduate may not be as well prepared for college and career success as their counterparts elsewhere. Normandy's graduates have an average ACT composite score of 15, which is 5 points behind students statewide and in the 20th percentile of scores nationally. Of the students who enter college, just 13% of the district's college enrollees obtain a degree after six years, compared to 50% statewide.

In keeping with current trends in education, Normandy measures several non-academic indicators of quality, including school climate and safety. When asked their opinion of the school climate, 44% of students and 36% of teachers had a favorable response.^{xv} Just over a third of students say they feel safe at school.

Developing a more cohesive school culture is challenging when rates of teacher attrition are high, as they are at Normandy. While there are many high-quality teachers who stay, the revolving door results in many first-year educators, who are less likely to be effective at building rapport with students or improving academic outcomes.

At \$13,000 per pupil, Normandy currently spends more than most districts in Missouri. However, the budget is in deficit, and stakeholders report that resources in the classroom are insufficient. Although the direct financial impact of a charter school within the district includes many variables, each departing student would take at least \$9,000 with them.

With all due respect and gratitude to any external party with genuine good intentions for all involved, today's lingering challenges reveal serious external threats from multiple governance layers, trust issues, and failed promises. But we hope and pray tomorrow is a brighter day.

Tomorrow's Hopeful and Sovereign Path Forward **"Call to Action"**

We welcome the input of parents, community members, teachers, school staff, and all other stakeholders toward these guiding principles that will move our beloved Normandy school district forward.

1. The children of community deserve the highest quality public education that prepares them for life, no matter the direction they choose.
2. We as community leaders and all of our residents must support our children and their families in every manner possible to ensure that they can succeed in their educational pursuits.
3. We as community leaders and all of our residents must support the Normandy Schools Collaborative and hold them accountable for the individual and collective success of our children and our school district.
4. We fully support any parent who believes an educational option other than the Normandy Schools Collaborative is best for their child.
5. Because we believe in our educational sovereignty, we oppose any privately governed charter school that does not afford our community the opportunity for consent over the education of our children as well as the use of our tax dollars.

Conclusion

In summary, the 24:1 Community is committed to overcoming our daunting challenges to restore the prosperity and stellar reputation of our beloved school district and community. We welcome all partners and friends who understand and respect our position, the district's rich history, and the value of educational sovereignty. In the words of legendary Normandy educator Sheila Williams, "When you do something for me, without me, then you've done something to me." We say, "Not without us!" You will not help us without including us.

Thank you all for taking the time to read and understand our history, our pride, and our hopes and dreams for our children.

About the 24:1 Municipal Partnership

The 24:1 Municipal Partnership is a representation of municipal leaders working together in the 24:1 Community. Together, the partnership collectively focuses on good governance and providing efficient and effective services related to cost savings, municipal mergers, court hubs, policing, and tree resource improvement and maintenance.

About the 24:1 Community

The 24:1 Community is a testament to what happens when people come together to build each other up for the good of all. In 2008, local mayors, officials, and residents began a series of conversations in partnership with Beyond Housing on how to improve their communities and the lives of all who live there. From these discussions, the 24:1 was born. The name 24:1 was chosen by the community and represents the multiple municipalities within the Normandy school district united under one vision for creating strong communities, engaged families, and successful children.

Appendix

The 24:1 Municipal Partnership and our community partners have discussed many additional factors that impact our students' learning outcomes in the Normandy Schools Collaborative. As we embark on our path forward, we acknowledge that there may be additional beliefs and actions that rise in importance in addition to those listed within this document. Some of those possibilities are included in this appendix.

1. **Set aside clandestine agendas and transparently partner with one another in good faith to directly impact academic achievement.** Our current educational crisis is a collective failure at multiple governance levels, and we all have a responsibility to help where the community sees the greatest need: advancing instructional expertise and improving student achievement.
2. **Study the [2025 Normandy Schools Collaborative Strategic Plan](#).** This plan calls for \$8 million dollars in additional funding to “meaningfully change outcomes for the district’s students.”^{xvi}
3. **Assist in fundraising efforts to directly support Normandy’s instructional quality and enhanced academic rigor.** Securing funding will help Normandy enhance its current professional development approach and hire accomplished, certified teaching staff. It will also advance Normandy’s ability to provide a competitive education for our children rather than a barely adequate one. Currently the bar for improvement is set so low as to continue to leave many of our students behind. For example, as mentioned above, the percentage of all students working on grade level across reading and math is 5%. The 2025 transformation target is a modest 15%.^{xvii}
4. **Respect our educational sovereignty.** On the matters of choice and educational urgency, we respect every Normandy parent’s right to quality and readily available education choices for their children, and we are committed to make that a reality for all of our children. This is evidenced by the extensive hard work invested in the last decade to return to provisional accreditation. However, in the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson writes, “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”^{xviii} The Normandy 24:1 community has conferred no such authority on the people who currently control and are proposing to change the education delivery system for the children of this community.
5. **Evolve Missouri’s approach to school funding.** More affluent school districts can rely on their local property tax base to supplement state and federal funding to provide competitive educations to their students. Majority Black school districts like Normandy have to rely on superstar fundraising efforts and the generosity of the nonprofit community to supplement funding. Researching funding models in other states and understanding the

average annual cost of a competitive education versus an adequate one is a good place to start.

6. **Consider adopting a standard teacher salary schedule at the state level, with a centralized funding pool.** This measure, which many other states have adopted, ensures that no matter which school district a teacher is employed by, the pay is the same. It also eliminates competition between districts and prevents the dynamic we see in Normandy, where the district can't compete with surrounding pay rates, hampering its efforts to attract top teaching talent.

ⁱ The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools. (2015). "Out of Control: The Systematic Disenfranchisement of African-American and Latino Communities Through School Takeovers." Retrieved from <http://www.reclaimourschools.org/sites/default/files/out-of-control-takeover-report.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools.

ⁱⁱⁱ Forward Through Ferguson. (2020, Sept. 30). "Still Separate, Still Unequal: A Call to Level the Uneven Education Playing Field in St. Louis." Retrieved from <http://stillunequal.org/>.

^{iv} School of Education, American University. (2019, Dec. 19). "Teacher Retention: How Education Leaders Prevent Turnover." Retrieved from <https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/teacher-retention>.

^v EdBuild. (2019). "23 Billion." Retrieved from <https://edbuild.org/content/23-billion/full-report.pdf>.

^{vi} The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools. (2018). "Confronting the Education Debt: We Owe Billions to Black, Brown, and Low-Income Students and Their Schools." Retrieved from http://educationdebt.reclaimourschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Confronting-the-Education-Debt_FullReport.pdf.

^{vii} Forward Through Ferguson.

^{viii} Forward Through Ferguson.

^{ix} Attendance Works. (n.d.). "Chronic Absence: 10 Facts About School Attendance." Retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/the-problem/10-facts-about-school-attendance/>.

^x Joint Executive Governing Board. (2020, July 13). "2025 Strategic Plan: Normandy Schools Collaborative. Retrieved from <https://www.normandysc.org/cms/lib/MO02201556/Centricity/Domain/36/NSC%20Strategic%20Planning%202020.pdf>.

^{xi} The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. (n.d.). "3rd Grade Reading Success Matters." Retrieved from <https://gradelevelreading.net/>.

^{xii} Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). "Accountability Data." Retrieved from <https://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/accountability-data>.

^{xiii} Joint Executive Governing Board.

^{xiv} Joint Executive Governing Board.

^{xv} Joint Executive Governing Board.

^{xvi} Joint Executive Governing Board.

^{xvii} Joint Executive Governing Board.

^{xviii} The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.” Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.